

Nuclear Weapons in Japan

Starting in the fall of 1959 with my study of the command facilities and the nuclear weapons plans and operations in the Pacific, and going into 1960 and 1961 with my work in Washington with the air staff war planners, which took me to SAC Headquarters a couple of times, I came to know as much as any American, not only civilian but military, about the system of targeting and controlling vehicles for general nuclear war, and also the actual targets and structure of the plans.

I had spent the summer of '58 working conceptually on the strategic parts of the plan - including such missile forces as we had and the control of SAC B-52s - at Rand, in company with Wohlstetter, Rowen, Kahn, Marshall, et al.

In the Pacific, what I was learning was the role that was played by theater vehicles, which were scarcely taken into account at all in the thinking of SAC war planners. Rand's studies dealt almost entirely with SAC operations, which had to do with the B-52 force, at that time the heart of our retaliatory force, and the B-52 bases in the U.S., plus a handful of intermediate range missiles, Thors in England and Jupiters in Turkey. SAC paid little attention to vehicles which were not under their immediate operational control. In the theaters, however, both in the Pacific and in Europe, the theater commanders tended to think of their weapons as very important. The size of their weapons was very much smaller,

and in particular the reliability of their forces was very much less, because they consisted of airplanes on extremely vulnerable airfields, so that in the event of attack the likelihood of their survival would have been relatively small. Also, the range of these vehicles was relatively short, so they were targeted on peripheral targets on what we still called the Sino-Soviet Bloc, and on targets that SAC regarded as much less important than the industrial targets and air bases which were in the heartland of Russia.

At one point during my work in the Pacific I became aware of the fact ~~of the~~^{that} number of bases in Japan which were targeted to deliver weapons in the event of general nuclear war, or execution of the CINCPAC-GEOP. Japan had as the central provision of its security arrangements with the United States the explicit agreement in writing that no nuclear weapons would ever be stationed in Japan. There was actually an exception to this which was undoubtedly known, at least tacitly, to some of the high officials in Japan, that American carriers that had R-and-R or occasional stops in the ports of Japan would in fact have nuclear weapons aboard. But there was a policy of the Department of Defense, up until very recently, that we would not acknowledge the presence of nuclear weapons on any particular warship, or for that matter, base, anywhere in the world. One major purpose of that was to avoid having to admit that there were nuclear weapons on such carriers. In fact, I believe that

there had been occasions when we had denied that there were such nuclear weapons. But by something of a tacit agreement, even the left in Japan had not made a major political issue out of this, although they could have done so at any time. And a subject of a good deal of discussion in the Department of Defense was the prospect that eventually we might want Polaris submarines to come into Japanese ports. The possibility that they could suffer a collision with some other ship meant they could conceivably release radioactive material or suffer what was known as an HE explosion of the high explosive shell around the nuclear core, or even a partial or full explosion of a missile. These results either of collision or an accident aboard the ship were a small but real possibility, and we could anticipate that there would be a great deal of reaction against this because of what the U.S. Government regarded as the somewhat neurotic obsession of the Japanese with the problem of nuclear explosions. This had already been discussed in connection with our carriers. A third prominent and already controversial problem was our nuclear submarines, other than Polaris, which themselves offered the possibility of the release of radio-active materials in connection with accidents, as has occasionally happened. We were well aware that all three of these offered potential for major diplomatic problems.

However, we did not violate the agreement to the extent

of actually basing weapons in any of our U.S. Air Force bases in Japan, which did have a very sizeable number of nuclear weapons targets assigned to them in the Vladivostok area and, of course, in China. Earlier issues had arisen over using Japanese bases during the Korean war, for transit, and later there was to be considerable controversy, over the use of Japan as a staging area for airplanes on the way to Vietnam. In fact, a great controversy even arose over the considerable use made of Okinawa for that purpose, and the return of the island to Japan, to prevent such operations. Everyone was very conscious of this as a live issue, so people were unusually conscious of the provisions of our security treaty with Japan which forbade the use of bases for nuclear weapons. We visited every major Air Force base in Japan while I was there and there was much awareness of all this.

The plans actually called, in the event of certain emergencies, for the use of Japanese bases despite this agreement, although in principle we were to get the approval of the Japanese premier before we used them. But the plans called for the transfer of nuclear weapons from Okinawa, and other places like Guam, to Japan. That process which would take a number of hours - I can't remember exactly - but at least six or eight hours, and the reason that it was that fast was that as part of the alert plan operation KC-97 tankers on Okinawa had nuclear weapons aboard and they were on alert. In a general war alert - which, as we discussed

earlier, could have been a false alarm - these planes would take off for Japan. In principle they could be called back if it turned out to be a false alarm. Unlike other planes which could be launched on alert, it was not arranged that they should circle around waiting for an execute; since they were merely delivering weapons without actually dropping them, the plan was that they would go directly to the Air Force bases in Japan and deliver their bombs. This allowed, then, for the possibility or risk that in a false alarm, bombs would be landed in Japan, conceivably without having obtained the approval of the Japanese premier and thus in violation of our treaty. On the other hand, since this would be at U.S. bases it would not follow that the Japanese would actually know that this had happened. It was regarded as an acceptable risk to plan on that basis. Anyway, it was assumed that under conditions of that urgency we were willing to take a risk of violating the treaty.

The very complexity of these plans, of course, was a tribute to the fact that the treaty provision was taken with considerable seriousness. It was understood by everybody that a violation of that provision was likely to lead to an abrogation of the security treaty, and probably to the fall of any pro-U.S. government in Japan and its replacement by a government that would entirely change its relationship with the U.S. and with China. And among other things it would lead to the loss of U.S. bases both in Japan and in Okinawa.

Nearly all of the planes to receive these nuclear weapons

were Air Force planes. They were not on quick alert, inasmuch as it would take 6-12 hours for their weapons to arrive. And the plans were not absurd, in that it was more likely than not that a general war situation would be preceded by a period of at least hours or days of considerable warning; unless it were a surprise attack out of the blue, which was the least likely situation, and in which SAC would be the principle retaliatory force in any case. The forces as a whole in the Pacific were regarded simply as supplementing the forces of SAC, and supplementing with such low reliability, slowness, and small weapons, from the point of view of SAC, that SAC did not bother to include them in their plans. That is, in establishing a target list that SAC thought of as critical targets, in purchasing SAC planes to cover those targets, in training them and supplying them and everything else, SAC covered all targets with its own weapons and did not allocate any of these targets to theater forces. So theater forces simply covered supplemental targets, or else added additional weapons onto targets that were already covered by SAC. The redundancy of this process, incidently, was such that many of the targets regarded as important would have 17, 20 or 25 different vehicles assigned to them, any one of which would have destroyed the target and its surrounding area. And a target like Moscow probably had well over 100.

I mention all this to put into perspective the fact

the one small base in Japan, namely Iwakuni, which was a Marine air base, had a handful of planes on it with general war missions, whose mission could not have been more marginal to the overall war plans. It involved only a few Marine planes, whose mission and training, of course, was primarily for limited war missions as in Korea, and whose main training was with high explosive. But they did have, nevertheless, a secondary general war role, and even an alert status in some cases. I discovered at some point in my Pacific travels - whether originally on the 7th Fleet command ship or in Japan, I don't remember, but I corroborated it later in talking to the chief of war plans at CINCPAC headquarters - that because this was a Marine base and because of the special relation of the Marines with the Navy, the Navy had an arrangement whereby an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) was stationed just offshore of Iwakuni with nuclear weapons aboard, to provide these bombs for the handful of planes at Iwakuni. This LST was permanently stationed in the territorial waters of Japan. It had the cover mission of being an electronic repair ship. In line with this cover, it was not just in the 3-mile limit, it was actually anchored 100 or 200 yards offshore. It was virtually on the beach at Iwakuni. By any standards it was stationed on the territory of Japan.

The principle of its operation was that in any kind of emergency, it would come straight ashore, beaching as it is designed to do. The front of the ship would open up and

the bombs would come out on amphibious tractors, going straight to the airfield where they would be loaded upon Marine planes. Thus, this handful of Marine planes would have their weapons some 6 to 10 hours before the hundreds of planes assigned to the Air Force in Japan. Presumably they would not take off in advance of those planes. And whether they did or not, their contribution to the general war plan was of an absolutely negligible sort; it was not taken into account even by the local U.S. theater planning in Japan by the Air Force or Navy carrier forces, let alone by our major SAC retaliatory forces.

The landing of the tractors and bombs was a maneuver that the LST apparently practices occasionally, as rehearsal; and the existence of these bombs was apparently fairly well known at the base, although it was not generally well known either by the Air Force or, of course, by the Japanese. It was regarded as a super-secret from the Japanese, needless to say.

By the time I learned of this, I was as well informed as anyone, probably, in the country to make an assessment of the potential advantage of allowing those planes to have weapons a few hours earlier than the other planes in the country. There could be no question, thinking of every conceivable contingency, that there was no advantage whatever, under any conceivable circumstances, for that to happen. Every planner to whom I spoke, at 7th Fleet and

at CINCPAC, shared that opinion. The risk that was being run was that if the Japanese government should become aware of this, and particularly if the opposition to the Japanese government should become aware of it, there would be a total rupture of diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States, very possibly a shift toward the Chinese, who at that time were regarded as still part of the Soviet Bloc.

How could this have become known to the Japanese? Well, people told me that the situation was fairly well known not only by the pilots who practised this maneuver occasionally, and by the LST ship crewmen who were there permanently, but, needless to say, to some fraction of their girlfriends in Japan and probably of the people in the region. (As a footnote to this sort of thing, one day I was looking for the concealed, camouflaged underground, CINCPAC command-post, whose location was "secret" in Hawaii; it was located, indeed, under an absolutely normal-looking pineapple field criss-crossed by dirt roads. I became lost and stopped at a gas station with some Chinese-Americans running it to ask them for the location of Fields Corner, or some name like that, which was a map location that identified the area of this entrance to the underground command post. And the man seemed very puzzled by what I was asking for, until finally he said, "Oh, you mean the underground," and gave

me the exact directions for reaching it. This sort of thing is absolutely normal.) It could almost be taken for granted that some Japanese in that area did know about this.

I was also aware, from the study at Rand of the possibilities of sabotage, that there would be no trick whatever for frogmen, whether Japanese or others, going out to that ship, planting limpet mines to the side of the ship and causing an explosion on the ship, which would at the least raise public questions about the nature of the ship and the incident, or conceivably cause a high explosive or a partial or total nuclear explosion on board the ship, if they were lucky. (In fact, the mine could be nuclear itself). So there was literally the possibility ^{of} for a nuclear explosion taking place in Iwakuni, followed by an investigation that would discover that we had stationed a few weapons here. There would be no way ever of telling that that explosion had been caused by outsiders as opposed to an accidental explosion by American weapons that were placed aboard that ship. (The actual cause of the explosion of the Maine remains uncertain to this day!)

The stationing of these weapons, for such a reason, was the most fantastically irresponsible action it was possible to imagine: short of, perhaps, storing, unnecessarily, some accident-prone weapons in Washington, D.C. Yet the secrecy system in the atomic weapons area

kept this known, among Americans outside Iwakuni, only to a small circle of nuclear weapons planners. In fact, the fact that I knew it at that point stamped me as someone who knew just about anything, which itself was an open door to any further secrets. When I got back in the country, I was extremely concerned about this situation but didn't know what to do with the information. I told the highest officials at Rand about it to see what they could do. They in turn told an Air Force Plans officer, a general; I was told, through a Vice President of Rand, Goldstein, ^{that} the Air Force officers agreed that this was an extremely serious situation, but they did not know what to do about it since it was, after all, controlled by the Navy. and that it would be an extremely delicate matter for the Air Force to raise questions about where the Navy was storing its nuclear weapons, since on matters like that, there tended to be alliances between the Navy and the Air Force. In fact, for a long time there had been an alliance between the Navy and the Air Force on the subject of reliance on nuclear weapons, as opposed to the Army, which was disadvantaged in the budget battle by this sort of alliance. So it wasn't advantageous for the Air Force to make waves for the Navy, so to speak.

This went on in 1960; I didn't know what to do further about the situation. However as soon as Paul

Nitze got in as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, who thus was in charge both of liaison with the military, on the one hand, and with diplomatic relationships on the other; I wrote a memo to Nitze ~~and~~ through Harry Rowen, his Deputy, I was asked to put it all in writing and to do the typing myself for special security. I typed out a memo and stamped it "TOP SECRET - Eyes Only for Paul Nitze," giving in detail all that I knew and how I had come to know it about the situation, naming the LST and giving an analysis based on my experience of the pros and cons: i.e. the ways in which this could be rationalized, and my conclusion that the obvious risks were counterbalanced by almost no military advantage whatever. I gave a fairly exhaustive analysis of that problem, because anyone coming into contact with such a grievous anomaly would first imagine that there must be some highly technical reason justifying it. Of course, it was evident to all people in the theater - none of whom made any strategic rationale whatever for it - that the reason was very simply that the Marines, having this intimate relation with the Navy, were able to have an LST nearby, whereas you could not keep an Air Force KC-97 flying at all times with nuclear weapons aboard in the vicinity of Japan. That was the only reason that they would have weapons sooner.

than anybody else. To belabor one point: there was only one such base involved, and this violation of the treaty affected only a handful of weapons out of the whole theater. It wasn't even as though a large number of Navy bases were influenced by this, so that it would affect a sizeable part of the forces. Yet the risk was virtually the same as if it had been a lot of bases.

Nitze had the memo "staffed out". He assigned, I believe, his assistant Timothy Stanley to investigate this, and perhaps also Larry McQuade, who was also an assistant. I was shown the TOP SECRET report that came out of this investigation. First, all of the facts that I had reported were corroborated. But also it was corroborated by the foreign relations specialists within ISA that there was no question but that this was a clear-cut violation of both letter and spirit of our security treaty. This was contrasted with such marginal cases as the carrier visits and even the possibility of our emergency alert plans being executed. This was a permanent installation and could not even be said to be "in the water, not on the territory," as it would be regarded by every legal test as being on the territory. And they corroborated the extreme diplomatic risks that this involved; the conclusion of that analysis was the same as mine, that it was of high urgency that this situation be corrected immediately.

But there was some additonal information. A person reported that on first investigating the whereabouts of this LST, he went to the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Atomic Weapons and Atomic Energy, who was in charge of knowing the whereabouts of every individual nuclear weapon in the world, including test devices and weapons under production and everything else. The Assistant had an enormous looseleaf notebook that had the reported whereabouts of every weapon in the world. No weapons were listed for Japan. No ship carrying weapons was listed as stationed there. And in fact there was no indication that any such situation existed. When Nitze's staff man pressed the point, the Special Assistant, who had extremely high status, by the way, and was a direct representative of the Secretary of Defense, called the appropriate agency in the Navy to check on it; he was told that there was no such situation. However, in later pursuing the name which I had supplied for the LST, Nitze's man discovered that it was listed as home-ported in Okinawa. And on following up that question, he discovered that it was being carried in Okinawa by the Navy as a cover precisely to deceive the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, while in fact it was permanently installed in Iwakuni. By a coincidence, at the very moment of this investigation, the ship was in Okinawa for repairs and overhaul, which was going to take another month or two, a situation that arose every three years.

or so. So at that moment it was not in Japan. All that had to be done, then, was to keep it in Okinawa, where it was officially home-ported.

It was quite clear to everybody, and not really denied by anybody, the reason it was carried on the books in Okinawa was to deceive the Secretary of Defense. And deception of the Secretary of Defense on the whereabouts of a nuclear weapon was recognized by everybody as the highest imaginable offense within the bureaucracy. It was not regarded as within the rules of the bureaucratic game, in the remotest sense. So the clearcut recommendation by Nitze's staff was that Nitze should take this up immediately with Secretary McNamara and see to it that the ship should remain in Okinawa. Paul Nitze drafted this recommendation, in roughly February or March of 1961; he drafted a memo for Secretary McNamara to sign, calling for the LST in question to remain in Okinawa, not to return to Japan, and to shift its operations exclusively into Okinawa. Immediately after that memo went out signed by McNamara, Paul Nitze found himself at a meeting in McNamara's office with Admiral Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, at the end of which Burke asked him to return with him to Burke's office in a different part of the Pentagon. When they arrived in the office, Burke sat down and Nitze immediately saw that on his desk was a "burn" copy (this was the predecessor of the xerox process) of my TOP SECRET Eyes Only".

memo to him, as well as a copy of the ISA investigative report. So it was clear that almost immediately, a Naval officer serving in ISA - ISA was staffed mainly with military officers - had copied the memo and delivered it to Admiral Burke. (The meaning of "Eyes Only" is that only the addressee, Netze, is to see the document, and no copy is to be made.) Burke referred to the memo; he made no apology for having a copy of it, which surprised Nitze more than it might have later, because Nitze was new to the Pentagon. Burke was in a fury. He made no attempt to deny the facts of the memo or to justify anything. The only argument he made, in a rage, was, "What did Nitze think he was doing, as a civilian, interfering with the operations of ships of the U.S. Navy?" The fact that this ship was in violation of one of our most sensitive international treaties and was posing enormous risks, that it was carrying nuclear weapons in violation of the Secretary of Defense's regulations and in deliberate deception of the Secretary of Defense, and that the Special Assistant had been lied to, did not come up for discussion as far as Burke was concerned. Nor would he admit any discussion of these points. His position was merely that it was absolutely unacceptable that the Secretary of Defense should presume to tell the Navy where to put its ships. Nitze was apparently very shaken by this, I was told, but decided...

QUESTION Shaken in what way? Furious or....?

No, shaken by the confrontation. Burke is a large, sandy-haired man who gets into rages.

QUESTION But Burke was totally wrong.

Ah, from one point of view.

But from the point of view of the Navy, well, Nitze was not in a clearcut command position with respect to Burke, except as he could be accepted as a direct representative of the Secretary of Defense. So everything depended, then, on McNamara's backing Nitze up on this issue. Nitze went to McNamara, I understand, and informed him that he felt that this was of the highest urgency and that he had to order Burke to comply with the directives and the treaty.

But at the point that I learned of this, McNamara had decided that, with all the fights he was having with the various services, this was one he could not afford to add; and therefore he decided to back down and to withdraw his directive, in violation of the treaty. When I heard this I raised the question: "Is McNamara aware that he was lied to by the Navy?" The answer was, "Yes, that was what had made him furious in the first place and had led him to send out the directive." He was very upset about that. But as I described much earlier, in 1961 the Secretary of Defense for the first time was in general exercising his command responsibility under the 1958 Reorganization Act, and he was doing so in a great variety of ways: in questioning the services about operational matters; in making many decisions on cutting back weapons

systems, in particular the B-70 and the number of Minuteman missiles from 1400 or 1600 to a projected level of 1000.

He was involved in a number of other disputes already with the services; he had to make a choice, and in this case he decided not to fight this issue, knowing of course that if he did fight there was always the chance that the Navy would leak the dispute to some Committee in Congress, in perhaps a distorted fashion, and put him in the position precisely of entering into operations by ordering around individual ships. Remember that two years later, when McNamara was in the position of telling the then Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Anderson, the successor to Burke, that his ships were violating the President's orders on the operation of the blockade around Cuba, Anderson had become so furious that he virtually ordered McNamara out of the Flag Plot command post. (The result was that that admiral was removed, after the crisis, as Chief of Naval Operations, and sent as ambassador to Portugal.) That was an unprecedented confrontation. But that was the kind of thing McNamara did not choose to get into in this case. So the upshot was, to my horror, that the ship which was then still in Okinawa was allowed to travel back to Japanese waters with its cargo of nuclear weapons.

The finale for me was that at the next meeting of the Air Force Advisory Board that controlled the Rand budget, there was apparently a curious session with LeMay, who by

then was the Chief of Staff. I was called in by Vice President Goldstein who said, "This is hard to believe, but we have a charge here from LeMay - he has been told by Admiral Burke - that you have been giving the Navy orders on how to operate a destroyer squadron. Is this possible?" My first reaction was "What?" Second, that it was not possible; and third, I suddenly realized what it was that he must be referring to, and told them the whole story of that episode. Burke had asked LeMay that I should be fired from the Rand Corporation.

In the end, nobody chided me, but everybody's reaction was that this was of extreme sensitivity because of the bureaucratic implications that it raised. It was putting one Service terribly in the wrong, in part because they had lied; their sin was so enormous that to expose it at all was rather a deadly challenge, and nobody wanted to take that on. The main thing I thought of was, does the President know this situation? I raised the question in ISA, "Is it possible that McNamara, having made this decision, has told the President of the situation?" They said that that was not realistically possible, otherwise it could not persist. To say that was to say it was taken for granted that McNamara had decided to collaborate in deceiving the White House on this situation. Whether that was true or not, I don't know. But from that time on it looked like a potential great embarrassment to McNamara himself, if he had concealed that.

So the fact was, in other words, that the secrecy system was being used - for reasons almost entirely of agency pride - to protect a totally irrational arrangement which had the most horrendous possible diplomatic implications, and it was out of the effective control of the President of the United States, let alone the Congress.

Exposing this to Congress would have immediately raised the secrecy question, even to someone on the Hill with a clearance who dealt with such matters. It would have been treated as the exposure of an extremely "sensitive" secret. And it was. Remember, what is a "sensitive secret?" It was a secret like My Lai. It is hard to say that My Lai was not a genuine secret, in the sense that exposure of it had the potential of "damage to the United States." The exposure of any egregious violation does.

In summary, we see a function of Rand here, in the ability of Rand analysts and consultants to cross bureaucratic lines, to become aware of information concealed by one agency from another, or by all agencies from higher levels of authority, who were authorized to know it but had been deliberately deceived about this information. We have the incident of information stamped and intended only for one recipient within the system, the Assistant Secretary of Defense, immediately being leaked internally; the copying of that document and delivering it to the CNO entirely

against DoD Regulations; in other words, the regulations are violated instantly and blatantly when that serves Service interests (of protecting a practice violating a U.S. treaty!) We have the deliberate and direct deception of the Secretary of Defense and his Special Assistant, and the defiance of ~~the Secretary by a lower agency~~ of his directive to change the situation, about which he had been deceived and about which he had been kept in ignorance by the protective secrecy system. We have also the inhibitions of everyone in the system not only to go against bureaucratic resistances but to do so in violation of secrecy regulations which ~~would have~~ made it difficult to go to Congress let alone to the press. Also we have the fact that what was a genuinely "sensitive" secret was so precisely because it involved a major violation of an international treaty by the United States. Indeed, if you ask what sorts of information could conform to the definition of "top secret" as potentially leading to a direct breach in diplomatic relationships, obviously it would cover to a large extent major violations of our understandings or treaties with other countries. And the capability to keep such sensitive secrets is an encouragement to violate Congressionally-ratified treaties, without any accountability to Congress or the public.